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SUBJECT Interview with Vitaly Churkin/Arms Control

CHARLIE ROSE: President Reagan surprised a lot of people earlier this month with the stand on the SALT II treaty. Some say even Moscow may have been caught off guard.

We're going to speak with a Soviet diplomat who specializes in arms control.

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ROSE: Joining us now to talk about the SALT II treaty is Vitaly Churkin, Second Secretary at the Soviet Embassy here in Washington. He heads the Embassy's Arms Control Office.

Did you pop the champagne bottles after the President announced, as Senator Symms suggested?

VITALIY CHURKIN: Well, no, not exactly. You know, in the arms control policy of this Administration, there is and has been nothing to be very glad about. We we're not suprised, as a matter of fact, by the general drift of this announcement because I think it could easily be predicted...

ROSE: Well, there were lots of alternatives, also, on the part of a number of people.

CHURKIN: But the general drift could be predicted, in that, first, it will be a drift away from the current arms control regime; and second, that the Administration will not do it overtly, that they will try to create the impression that actually they are trying to stay with the arms control regime.

2

So, it is something which we have seen all along: moving away from the arms control regime; but for the sake of the public, for the sake of the allies, creating the impression that the United States is working to strengthen the arms control regime.

ROSE: Let me stay with SALT II for a second, then.

CHURKIN: Okay.

ROSE: Clearly, the President had said, in campaigning in 1980, that it was fatally flawed, SALT II. But here he is complying with it and suggesting the Soviet Union has a number of violations, not only of this, really, but also with the ABM 1972 treaty.

My question is, it seems to the hard-liners on the right exactly the opposite of what you suggest, which is that the President is in fact taking that extra step on SALT II.

CHURKIN: Well, I'm not going to explain the position or the feelings of the hard-liners. I can explain our feelings and our position.

You should go beyond the headlines on this announcement and you should read, which I'm sure you did, the announcement itself, which also said that the United States is going to augment its strategic modernization programs, which is a very interesting turn of the policy. We have seen a lot of times that the United States is using the fact of negotiations to augment its strategic programs. But it is the first time that I have seen a side using the fact that it is going to leave a treaty, to abandon a treaty as a pretext to augment its strategic modernizations programs.

Then this announcement says that the United States, in fact, is going to choose which provisions to observe, of the treaty, and which not to observe. And then what is said is that the United States...

ROSE: Proportionate measures was what the President said.

CHURKIN: Well, we'll get into that later.

And then what is said is that the United States is going to choose any moment when it can say, "No longer we are abiding by this SALT II treaty."

And one of the positive aspects of arms control agreements is that they provide a certain predictability to the actions of the...

3

ROSE: If the President did not want to live up to the SALT II accord, why didn't he simply say: We no longer recognize, or we no longer will comply. We will not take the Poseidon out of our fleet, simply because the Soviets have not been in compliance with it, and we don't believe that it is a treaty that -- since it has not been ratified and is not in the best interest of the United States, we're not going to do it?

That's exactly what Secretary Weinberger was arguing that he should do and exactly Dick Perle...

CHURKIN: My explanation is that you see the same things happening now which you saw happening before. You remember that when this Administration came to power, they were saying that they did not want arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union at all, that they did not want the SALT II treaty, and other arms control agreements. But...

ROSE: Well, no, that's not what they said.

CHURKIN: Yes, it was.

ROSE: No, they didn't say they didn't want arms control negotiations, because they have negotiated in good faith in Geneva. And Mr. Nitze...

CHURKIN: You're not right in that. They came to power in January of '81, and the negotiations began only in June of '82. It took 18 months for this Administration -- and I'm coming over to your initial question -- under the pressure of the American public and under the pressure of the U.S. allies, to start negotiations.

The same thing we see happening now. The policy drift is towards abandoning the SALT II treaty, whereas the rhetoric is in favor of the SALT II treaty because...

ROSE: So it's a cover for abandonment.

CHURKIN: Yes. Exactly.

ROSE: What do you want the President and this Administration and this country to do in terms of SALT II and in Geneva?

CHURKIN: Well, in terms of SALT II, if they want to be serious about SALT II, they want to say -- they have to say that they're going to be serious about SALT II and they are going to abide by that treaty. If there are some questions, which we usually have, with respect to compliance, the alleged Soviet violations, which do not exist, then we can discuss those questions...

4

ROSE: Well, let's discuss those questions. Because as you know very well, they [unintelligible], I think, eleven violations, of which three of them they point to principally. It is the early warning system in Siberia, early warning system in Siberia, which you say is a space tracking system. That's one. Secondly, it is the encryption of the missile telemetry. And thirdly, it is whether you have added an extra land-based missile, the SS-25.

CHURKIN: It is interesting, and you pointed out correctly that in the context of the SALT II treaty, they have referred to that radar, which has nothing to do with the SALT II treaty.

ROSE: But with the ABM treaty of 1972.

CHURKIN: Yes. But in this particular case the future of the SALT II treaty was decided. It has nothing to do with the SALT II treaty.

The second two issues, telemetry. The SALT II treaty expressly permits all methods of transmitting telemetric information, including encryption, including encryption.

ROSE: So that's not a violation? That's not a violation?

CHURKIN: It is not a violation. It is not a violation.

We have been repeatedly saying to the American side: What channels of telemetry you do not want us to encrypt? Let us come to an agreement on those channels. Specify them in written form in a document, so that we could know what you really want of us.

They never said what they want. No American court is going to qualify it as a violation once the other side does not want to say what it really wants from the side it makes accusations against.

ROSE: Thank you, Vitaliy Churkin.

He is the Second Secretary at the Soviet Embassy, an expert in arms control.